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THE THIRTY-FIRST BIENNIAL REPORT
OF
THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF MONTANA

DECEMBER, 1952



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HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF MONTANA

THIRTY-FIRST BIENNIAL REPORT

TO

GOVERNOR JOHN W. BONNER

1952

Helena, Montana
December 1, 1952

Hon. John W. Bonner
Governor of Montana
Helena, Montana

Dear Sir:

We have the honor to submit herewith the thirty-first biennial report of the Historical Society of Montana for the years 1951-1952 in compliance with statute requirements.

We are respectfully,
Your obedient servants,

NORMAN WINESTINE,
President
M. G. BURLINGAME,
Vice-President
A. J. PARTOLL, Secretary

of the Board of Trustees of the Historical Society of Montana.

REPORT OF THE LIBRARIAN
OF THE
HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF MONTANA

Helena, Montana

Dec. 1, 1952

To the Board of Trustees of the
Historical Society of Montana,
Norman Winestone, President

I

Members of the Board:

I herewith submit the thirty-first biennial report of the Historical Society of Montana for the years 1951-1952.

Though it is customary to review briefly the history of the organization as a whole in such reports, I shall content myself with these preliminary remarks: This Society was organized in the year 1865. It is thus, in point of relative time, one of the oldest historical societies in the country. Antiquity is no particular recommendation in itself, but the fact that (throughout the years between 1865 and 1952) this Society has built up a superb state newspaper collection, an excellent manuscript collection, and a fine rare book collection, is of moment and significance. It is also remarkable because it did so under the constant and severe handicap of insufficient funds.

It is nearly axiomatic that no one reads a biennial report except the man who writes it. It ought nonetheless to be part of the record that for many years Montanans have been unaware of the fact that the historical library constitutes one of Montana's richest natural resources, albeit one that has been singularly neglected.

It is time Montana came of age, because it is profoundly true that there are two kinds of natural resources, the concrete and the abstract. Certainly, a community must first exploit its land, its timber, its minerals, its water, and its oil. Still, it is neither a complete community nor a mature one until it exploits its heritage. It is this latter process, it is the awareness of continuity, the appreciation of how we got where we are, that marks the mature community. It may be trite, but still it is germane to remark that if we would know where we are going, or where we are, we must first know where we've been. Do we in Montana know where we have been? Do we even know the rudimentary economic mechanics under which we have operated as a state? The answer is a blunt and categorical no.

Most Americans have long since concluded that there is practical merit in their children learning something about the history of their country. But Montanans have not ordinarily come to a like conclusion about their state.

Now there is abroad in the land a revival of interest in history, a revival which doubtless has its roots in the fact of today's unsettled and insecure state of affairs. This revival is reflected in Montana. There is a greatly heightened interest in local history - and this is a good thing.

But let those upon whom there is dawning an initial awareness of the importance of exploiting our heritage, of teaching our children to cherish the community that sustains them - let these people bear in mind that less than a decade ago a state governmental reorganization committee advocated the abolishment of the historical society. With myopic indifference to the great wealth stored here in this library, with no understanding of any value save that marked by the dollar sign, these people thought it economy to destroy the painstakingly gathered documents, manuscripts, letters, diaries, ledgers, account books, newspapers, and books which constitute the only real

physical evidence of our growth as a commonwealth. So dim was their vision that to save a very few dollars they would have destroyed a collection of raw materials which scholars all over the west have come to regard as one of the finest in the west.

True, this collection has not been exploited, but its value is not diminished by that fact. The lack of exploitation (except by out of state historians) is merely testimony to our own apathy, and is not testimony to the small value of that which we have neglected.

But now the situation has apparently changed. In 1949 the legislature gave the Society a new budget, a budget with which to hire a trained historian as a director, a budget with which to publish a magazine, a budget with which to hire another librarian and a secretary. More, the state caused to be erected a superb building with the best of facilities and equipment for the effective exploitation of our history; with space for a large museum; with two art galleries; with air conditioning and humidifying machinery.

Now, quite suddenly, we find ourselves with the finest physical plant of any historical society in the west. Those who have long agitated and who have worked hard and sincerely for these things have cause to rejoice; but let them remember that a few short years ago a legislature almost abolished the Society. It can happen again.

New buildings do not make a college. Only an awareness on the part of the populace of real value, and a willingness to sustain a long endeavor make a college. So it is with an historical society.

In two years we have come a long, long way. But we are not out from under the shadows. We have, in effect, pulled ourselves up by our boot straps -- but we need help and sustained support, legislative and popular.

II

Those members of the 1949 legislature who, for the first time since

1865, gave this Society a chance to operate effectively have a right to know what we have done with their money and their faith:

1. We have completed two years of publication of the Montana Magazine of History, and in that short span have pushed its circulation from zero to nearly two thousand. This gives the Montana Magazine of History the largest per capita circulation of any historical journal, professional or otherwise, in the entire region west of the Mississippi river.

2. We have, by virtue of this magazine, put on the market in print a great deal of very valuable historical material which would otherwise have remained hidden. This material concerns Montana. It will substantially aid text book writers and general historians in their task of fitting Montana into the matrix of national history.

3. Starting two years ago with no membership we now have a membership of nearly 2000. This has made the state a little in excess of \$8,000, since membership is \$3.00 per year and must be renewed each year. Moreover, this membership is constantly and swiftly growing. By January, 1954, we are confident of a membership of 4000. This would gross the state \$12,000 for the year 1953, and would net the state in the neighborhood of \$9,000 since the magazine (which goes along with membership) costs about \$3,000 a year to publish. The pleasure which this magazine has given many Montanans is an imponderable, but it is important. It has tremendously stimulated a desire among an ever widening group of Montanans to see that justice is done our history.

4. We have completed one room out of six in the new museum. This museum, planned by the Smithsonian Institution, being executed under the direction of a distinguished Exhibits Designer from the American Museum in New York, promises to be the finest of its kind in the entire west. John C. Ewers, Associate Curator of Ethnology at the Smithsonian Institution, wrote

of this museum (with one room completed and the framework for five others up and waiting) "This institution should become one of the country's outstanding historical museums." He went on to say: "Roughly, four-fifths of the exhibits remain to be planned in detail. Much hard work requiring specialized skills remains to be done. I believe we must judge the value of this museum in terms of its service to the people,.... I believe this museum will be a living memorial of which Montana's pioneers would have approved." John Evers is perhaps the country's leading designer of small and medium sized museums.

But a museum is something difficult to verbalize. Come see what we have done thus far for yourselves. We do not think you can be other than impressed.

5. In six months time, between May and October, 1952, this Society raised by public subscription a fund of \$58,000 with which to purchase the famous Malcolm S. Mackay collection of the paintings of Charles M. Russell. This collection, conservatively evaluated at \$250,000 will hang in the new Russell art gallery in the new building. It should be remarked that this Society raised this sum of money without recourse to legislative or other state support. It should also be noted that it raised the money with the expenditure of only a little over \$2,000 from the fund itself.

6 In the last year and a half the Society has conducted two series of state wide radio programs the purpose of which was to stimulate interest in the history of Montana and the endeavors of the Historical Society. In the same period of time, talks about Montana's history have been made before service clubs and womens clubs all over the state. Approximately thirty such talks have been made ranging geographically from Sidney in the east to Missoula in the west.

7. A fine arts division of the Historical Society has been organized.

The first exhibit of this organization opens in the north gallery of the new building on January first. This gallery will feature rotating art exhibits. Exhibits will change once each month. Montana artists will exhibit alternately with out of state artists. Thus, for the first time, Montana's artists have a state gallery where their works can be seen by Montanans. From all indications thus far it is apparent that this fine arts division will be entirely self sustaining.

8. While all these new activities have been launched, the routine (but very vital) functions of the historical library have continued without interruption. They have, as a matter of fact, increased in tempo and quantity. The Society employs two librarians, but they are, in effect, far more than librarians. They are a mixture of librarian, archivist, and editor. The ordinary visitor to this library has no conception of what these librarians do. He thinks of them as serving a function similar to that of a librarian in a public library. This, of course, is far from the fact.

In the first place they do a great deal of research. Some of this research is routine, such as checking old newspapers for birth notices for people who want provisional birth certificates. But the vast majority of the research is not routine at all. It involves digging in raw source material for obscure facts. Research of this nature is not a mechanical activity. It takes experience, intelligence, and great familiarity with Montana history. It likewise requires a clear understanding of the fundamentals of historical methodology.

Almost every mail brings research questions of this nature. Many of them are from professional historians who are producing books. Others are from historical novelists or short story writers. Still others are from amateur historians, and a large number are from teachers and school children.

Then there are the guide book producers, the encyclopedias and travel book publishers. These people often ask questions that require hours of statistical research. It is important that these statistics be accurately and promptly supplied. It is the librarian's function to supply them.

In addition, the librarians have to spend a great deal of time digging out material for people who come to the library personally. Though they are rarely given sufficient credit, the librarians have had a hand in many a book about Montana and the Northwest. They, in effect, did much of the research.

On top of all this, it is their responsibility to see that germane books, microfilm, letters, manuscripts, etc., are purchased by this library. Its effectiveness as a research center depends solely upon their perspicacity in this regard. Also, theirs is the task of cataloging, cross indexing, filing, and shelving.

Whatever other services this society may render, the basic services of collection, preservation, research, and publication are fundamental. The more spectacular activities are peripheral, if more widely known.

It should be emphasized that the value of this basic function cannot be put into terms of dollars. Suffice it to remark that had this library and its librarians not been in existence and had the collecting, preserving, and research not been done, Montana would be represented by a much more complete vacuum on library shelves all over the country than is presently the case (although it is bad enough as it is). Could anyone deny that such vacuum would have a most deleterious effect on Montana in hard and fast terms of dollars?

Many people all over the country have read the following books. But it has seldom if ever occurred to them that many of these books would probably never have been written had there been no Historical Society:

- Abbott, N. C., Montana in the making. 1931 (grade school text book).
- Aikman, Duncan, Calamity Jane and other lady wild cats. 1927.
- Aldrich, Bess S., The lieutenant's lady. 1942. Fiction.
- Athearn, R. G., Thomas Francis Meagher an Irish revolutionary in America. 1949.
- Bakeless, John, Partners in discovery, 1947.
- Banks, Eleanor, Wander Song. 1950. (Biography of Henry McDonald)
- Birney, Hoffman, Vigilante. 1928.
- Briggs, H. E., Frontiers of the northwest. 1940.
- Burlingame, M. G., Montana frontier, 1942.
- Campbell, W. C., From the quarries of Last Chance Gulch. 1951.
- Dick, Everitt, Vanguards of the frontier. 1941.
- Glasscock, C. B., The war of the copper kings. 1935.
- Guthrie, A. B., The big sky. 1947. Fiction.
- Guthrie, A. B., The way west. 1949. Fiction.
- Hagedorn, Herman, The magnate. (Biography of William B. Thompson) 1935.
- Haines, Francis, Red eagles of the northwest. 1939.
- Howard, Joseph K., Montana high wide and handsome. 1943.
- Howard, Joseph K., Montana margins. 1946.
- Howard, Joseph K., Strange empire. 1952.
- Hubbard, Margaret A., Lone boy. 1943. Juvenile. (Miss Hubbard spent 6 weeks in the library on research).
- Hueston, Ethel, Calamity Jane of Deadwood Gulch. 1937.
- Jensen, V. H., Heritage of conflict. 1950.
- McWhorter, L. V., Hear me, my chiefs. 1952.
- Murphy, Clyde, The glittering hill. 1944. Fiction.
- Osgood, E. S., The day of the cattleman. 1929.

- Owen, Major John, The journals and letters of Major John Owen, ed. by Seymour Dunbar and P. C. Phillips. 1927.
- Paul, Elliott, A ghost town on the Yellowstone. 1948.
- Poston, Richard W., Small town renaissance. 1950.
- Price, Esther G., Fighting spotted fever in the Rockies. 1948.
- Ray, Tom, Yellowstone kid. 1948. Fiction.
- Raymer, R. G., Montana, the land and the people. 1930. 3 vols.
- Riley, Emmett J., Development of the Montana state educational organization. 1864-1930. 1931.
- Smith, A. J., Brother Van; a biography of William Wesley Van Orsdel. 1948.
- The story of the Tobacco Plains country. 1950.
- Thane, Eric (Ralph Henry), High border country. 1942.
- Thane, Eric (Ralph Henry), The majestic land. 1950.
- Vestal, Stanley, Sitting Bull. 1932.
- Wentworth, E. N., America's sheep trails. 1948.
- Wolle, Muriel S., Stampede to timberline. 1949. (Visited library in 1951 for research on her next book)
- Yost, Karl, Charles M. Russell, a bibliography. 1948.
- Federal Writers' project. Montana. A state guide book. 1939.
- Federal Writers' project. Copper Camp. 1943.
- Furthermore, the library has been rather extensively used by people working on Ph.D dissertations and Master's theses. Just a few examples are:
- Albright, R. E., Relations of Montana with the federal government. Stanford University, 1935.
- Foor, F. L. Senatorial aspirations of W. A. Clark, 1898-1901. University of California, 1941.
- Oviatt, A. B., Mullan Trail. University of California, 1947.

White, Sister Mary Afra, Catholic Indian missionary influence in the development of Catholic education in Montana. St. Louis university. 1946.

Toole, K. Ross. Political History of the Anaconda Copper Mining Company. University of California, 1953.

III

This Society now has a staff of three people: a director and two librarians. It has one secretary who doubles as a bookkeeper. It operates on a total annual budget of \$21,395. It is about to move into a new building with nearly seven times its present floor space. It now has charge of a Russell gallery with pictures evaluated at \$300,000. It does not even have a guard to be present on the same floor as the gallery. This means that if we are to keep this gallery open we must have tangible help from the state. We feel that we have done our part. We have raised \$58,000 by public subscription. We have purchased the paintings. Now we want the state to supply a guard as specified in our proposed budget for 1953-55.

We likewise feel that an increase in our budget from \$21,395 to \$44,000 is manifestly reasonable in view of the new services we render and in view of our concrete accomplishments in the past two years. We have been given a Cadillac in the form of our new quarters. Now we'd like the gas to make it run.

We have no desire to expand merely for expansion's sake. We have expanded, and would like to continue to do so, only on the basis of services rendered. In most states the historical society is an integral department of state. It ought to be, and we hope it will be, in Montana.

Respectfully submitted,

K. Ross Toole, Librarian